

What is claimed is:

1. A release process for creating and modifying shared data for use in a computer network comprising a staging system and an on-line system, the release process comprising:
  - updating a record in the staging system;
  - 5 packaging the record into an update package, the update package indicating a specified time for the release process;
  - transferring the update package from the staging system to the on-line system at the specified time;
  - and updating the on-line system using the update package at the specified time.
- 10 2. The release process of claim 1 wherein the step of updating a record in the staging system further comprises the steps of:
  - scanning the staging system for the record to be updated, the record having a field which indicates a specified time for the release process;
  - obtaining the record to be updated; and
  - 15 applying the update to the staging system.
3. The release process of claim 2, wherein the step of applying the update to the record in the staging system further comprises the steps of:
  - determining whether the update completed correctly; and
  - reexecuting the update if the update was not completed correctly.
- 20 4. The release process of claim 1, further comprising the step of maintaining data consistency during the step of updating a record in the staging system.
5. The release process of claim 4, wherein the step of maintaining data consistency further comprises the steps of:

accessing the record in the staging system to be updated, the record having a specified time for the release process; and

locking the record to be updated to prevent others from accessing or editing the record during the step of updating a record in the staging system.

- 5 6. The release process of claim 4, wherein the step of maintaining data consistency further comprises the steps of:

accessing the record in the staging system to be updated;

determining modifications and release dates already stored for the record to be updated;

- 10 determining the release date for the step of updating a record in the staging system; and

determining whether modifications have already been made to the record to be updated for the release date for the step of updating a record in the staging system.

- 15 7. The release process of claim 1 wherein the step of packaging the record into an update package further comprises the steps of:

obtaining the record scheduled for release on a specified date from the staging system; and building an update package for each on-line system.

8. The release process of claim 1 wherein the step of packaging the record into an update package further comprises the steps of:

- 20 determining the release date for the current update;

identifying records scheduled for release for the release date;

extracting the records scheduled for release for the release date; and

packaging the extracted records into a file for transfer to the on-line system.

9. The release process of claim 1 wherein the data is transferred from the staging system to the on-line system using FTP.

10. The release process of claim 1 wherein the step of transferring the update package further comprises the steps of:

5        locating the target on-line system to which the update package will be transferred;  
and

transferring the update package to the target on-line system.

11. The release process of claim 1 wherein the step of updating the on-line system further comprises the step of:

10        receiving the update package in the on-line system;

locking the record to be updated;

opening the update package;

updating the record to be updated; and

closing the update package.

15    12. A method for automating the procurement and purchasing of items in a computer network comprising a staging system and an on-line system, the method comprising:

a release process, for creating, modifying, and maintaining shared data in a collaborative environment.

20    13. The method of claim 12 wherein the release manager module further comprises the steps of:

means for updating a record in the staging system;

means for packaging the record into an update package;

means for transferring the update package from the staging system to the on-line system; and

means for updating the on-line system.

14. A system for performing a release process for creating, maintaining and modifying shared data in a collaborative environment comprising:

5 a staging system for maintaining the created, maintained, and modified data which is to be used during the release process;

an on-line system, coupled to the staging system, for maintaining the most current version of the shared data in the collaborative environment; and

a release manager module for performing a release process.

15 15. The system of claim 14 wherein the system is a procurement system for automating the procurement and purchase of items.

16. The system of claim 14 wherein the system is a web-centric application.

17. A system for collaborative data sharing in a computer network comprising a staging system and an on-line system, the system comprising:

means for updating a record in the staging system;

15 means for packaging the record into an update package;

means for transferring the update package from the staging system to the on-line system; and

means for updating the on-line system.

18. The system of claim 17 wherein the means for updating a record in the staging  
20 system further comprises:

means for scanning the staging system for the record to be updated;

means for obtaining the record to be updated; and

means for applying the update to the staging system.

19. The system of claim 17, wherein the means for applying the update to the record in the staging system further comprises:

means for determining whether the update completed correctly; and

means for reexecuting the update if the update was not completed correctly.

5 20. The system of claim 17, further comprising means for maintaining data consistency during the current update to the record in the staging system.

21. The system of claim 17, wherein the means for maintaining data consistency further comprises:

means for accessing the record in the staging system to be updated; and

10 means for locking the record to be updated to prevent others from accessing or editing the record during the update process.

22. The system of claim 17, wherein the means for maintaining data consistency further comprises:

means for accessing the record in the staging system to be updated;

15 means for determining modifications and release dates already stored for the record to be updated;

means for determining the release date for the current update; and

means for determining whether modifications have already been made to the record to be updated for the release date for the current update.

20 23. The system of claim 17 wherein the means for packaging the record into an update package further comprises:

means for obtaining the record scheduled for release on a specified date from the staging system; and

means for building an update package for each on-line system.

24. The system of claim 17 wherein the means for packaging the record into an update package further comprises:

means for determining the release date for the current update;

means for identifying records scheduled for release for the release date;

5 means for extracting the records scheduled for release for the release date; and

means for packaging the extracted records into a file for transfer to the on-line system.

25. The system of claim 17 wherein the means for transferring the update package further comprises:

10 means for locating the target on-line system to which the update package will be transferred; and

means for transferring the update package to the target on-line system.

26. The system of claim 17 wherein the means for updating the on-line system further comprises:

15 means for receiving the update package in the on-line system;

means for locking the record to be updated;

means for opening the update package;

means for updating the record to be update; and

means for closing the update package.

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